Subverting Domestic Violence: A Critical Study of the Select Texts of Adichie, Quindlen, Hosseini, Kandasamy and Selvaratnam

PhD Synopsis

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Domestic violence or intimate partner violence can be defined as a pattern of behavior in any relation that is used to gain control and power over an intimate partner. Abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological actions or threats of actions that can seriously harm the other person. The many forms of domestic violence are closely linked to each other and cannot be viewed separately. Edwards in the text *Sex, Gender and the Legal Process* argues that the prefix domestic is used with violence to justify and neutralize the full horror and viciousness associated with the act (180). Domestic violence can be perpetrated on anyone regardless of gender, age, class or economic condition. Domestic abuse cripples the victim physically, emotionally as well as psychologically to the point that their whole identity is sabotaged. It causes many psychological ailments like chronic stress, anxiety disorder, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Despite the fact that domestic violence can happen to both women and men, women continue to be the primary targets of this crime. Violence against women is motivated by multiple factors such as patriarchy, gender inequality, economic dependence, and limited public space access. Familial violence against women has negative repercussions on both women and children who can or cannot be the primary victims. Domestic abuse can be perpetrated through marital rape, threat of murder, actual murder, torture, slapping, hitting, verbal abuse, thrashing and more. The violent nature of domestic abuse ranges from physical torture to forced sexual gratification to mental harassment for reasons like non-payment of dowry, reinforcement of toxic masculinity, or disobedience to male authority.

Violence has received considerable attention in theory. Slavoj Zizek in the text *Violence* argues that violence has many contours and the apparent violence is generated by the objective violence. Zizek defines subjective violence as the visible part of the violence where the acts of crime, and terror are perpetrated, and the objective violence as the invisible violence inherent to the normal state of affairs. Susan Brownmiller in the text *Against Our Mill: Men, Women and Rape* argues that men use rape as a tool of force and a conscious act of intimidation against women to keep them in a constant state of fear despite their struggles and protestations. Susan argues that the physiological difference between men and women ensures the possibility of forceful intercourse and gives men an upper hand. Through this act of violence, men exert their superior strength over women and consequentially pose a threat to their identity. Feminism has attempted to explore domestic violence from multiple perspectives whereby it mainly seeks to uncover the causes of violence against women and attributes such causes mainly to sexism and

unequal power relations. Feminists argue that the physical abuse does not only include the physical violence but the threat of it. They reiterate that the threat of violence is enough to create fear and control and thus disallow women any agency in retorting back against the violence. Feminist argument indicates patriarchy as the direct cause of wife abuse in addition to other indirect causes. Cathy Humphreys and et al. in the book argue that fear, control and the atmosphere of terror that permeates domestic violence is not captured, as well as many forms of psychological, social and financial abuse (15). When women suffer domestic abuse they mostly bear the harassment silently because they fear the separation, divorces, homelessness, negative impact on the children and the guilt of breaking the family system. Home is considered a safe space for everyone in general and when violence takes place in this safe space, the ability to make sense of the situation and consequentially take stand against it is seriously impaired. Domestic violence is perpetrated to take away the security, freedom, dignity of women and render them helpless and dependent. Prahlad Rai and Rai Manju in their text *Violence against Women* argue that "violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms" (x). Domestic violence is influenced by culture, religion, lifestyle, and mental health conditions as well. Walter S. DeKeseredy in the book *Violence Against Women: Myths, Facts, Controversies* argues that when socio-cultural and structural factors within the institutions of marriage and family as well as law, religion and media are examined, the question of why domestic violence and why gender matters become evident (35). While domestic violence is present in almost all cultures and societies, it can also be culture specific and can also vary in intensity. The cultural constructs of domestic violence reveal that power and violence are highly gendered and men who exhibit higher power and violence in their immediate relationships are considered manlier. The gendered structure of violence also reveals how masculinity and femininity is viewed in the society. The continuous violence against women is also perpetrated because of the coercive control that men have over the psyche and overall well-being of women. This coercive control is primarily exerted through power, control and fear tactics. The problem of domestic violence has wider implications because family becomes the instrument and agency which perpetrates the abuse. Other than impacting the women, domestic abuse scars the psyche of children. The domestic violence victims tend to see their abuser as their protector because of unhealthy emotional attachments, unavailability of proper protection shelters or economic dependency. This process enables the abuser and makes the abuse last longer because of less resistance. To resist against domestic violence, it is important to analyze the individual experiences and

uncover the social order that perpetuates injustice and inequality against women, so that the justice is served at the structural level too.

The proposed study will attempt to study and analyze domestic violence across various cultures as portrayed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus,* Anna Quindlen's *Black and Blue,* Khalid Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns,* Meena Kandasamy's *When I Hit You, Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* and Tanya Selvaratnam's *Assume Nothing: A Story of Intimate Violence.*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's debut novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2007) is set against the instable political background of Nigeria and shows the growth and identity formation of the protagonist after going through the exploitation at the hands of her father. In Adichie's text gender-based violence is portrayed in the form of domestic abuse. Adichie subtly shows the complex nature of the family system and the power that abusers have over their victims. However, through Kambili, Adichie also provides hope of redemption in the face of adversity and oppression.

Domestic violence is also portrayed in American author Anna Quindlen's *Black and Blue* (2011). Quindlen explores the dark reality of domestic violence reflected in the trauma bonding that victims and abusers share. Quindlen accurately shows how children sometimes become the reason that women fail to leave the abusive relationships for fear that their children may suffer financial and emotional crisis.

Khalid Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2013) posits a grim picture of domestic violence. Hosseini shows domestic violence as a result of both patriarchy and conflict in war torn Afghanistan. The novel tells the story of two women and their struggle against the abuse at the hands of their husband. Hosseini asserts that the suffering of women is common therefore they share the common pain and trauma of violence. The sisterhood between women is in itself a rebellion against the abuse that they are subjected to.

Domestic abuse and marital conflicts have also been explored by Indian author Meena Kandasamy in her memoir *When I Hit You, Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* (2018). Kandasamy's book is in part her personal testimony of the abuse that she suffered in her marriage. Kandasamy gives disturbing and stark details of the exploitation. Kandasamy breaks the myth that modern and educated women do not suffer in their marriages and reveals how well educated and self-sufficient women too are trapped in abusive marriages sometimes.

Tanya Selvaratnam's memoir *Assume Nothing: A Story of Intimate Violence* (2021) also deals with the abuse of power in marital relationships and the consequential suffering that comes with it. The memoir aptly portrays that violence against women exists across race, class, economic status, and education levels. The text bravely shows the story of self-revelation and redemption in the face of exploitation.

Review of Literature

Many writers have attempted to theorize domestic violence and issues related to it. A number of books and articles have been written on the forms and consequences of domestic abuse and how women deal with the trauma caused by it. The anthology titled *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse* edited by Kersti Yllo and Michele Bograd contains many essays that deal with questions like what is the relationship between child abuse and wife abuse. The book *The Domestic Assault of Women* by Donald G. Dutton investigates the psychology of both the abusers and the victims to understand the working of the violence and thus provide subsequent treatment and therapy to prevent the reinforcement of the assault. Allison Crowe and Christine E. Murray in their text *Overcoming the Stigma of Intimate Partner Abuse* give examples of the survivors of domestic violence to highlight the strength, and resilience of the victims. The book *When Battered Women Kill* by Angela Brown calls out patriarchal culture and the incompetency of the legal system in addressing the issues of violence. The anthology titled *Domestic Violence: Intersectionality and Culturally Competent Practice* edited by Lettie L Lockhart and Fran S Danis employs a case study approach to analyze the various cultural paradigms and the role of religion in shaping the attitude and behavior of both abusers and the victims. The text also studies domestic violence in rural environments and among the teens. Mary Susan Miller's book *No Visible Wounds: Identifying Nonphysical Abuse of Women by their Men* addresses many forms of nonphysical abuse like denying access to economic provisions, getting angry over minor incidents, disallowing victims to meet friends or family.

Not much has been done on the works of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Khalid Hosseini, Anna Quindlen, Meena Kandasamy and Tanya Selvaratnam. The secondary work on their writing is in the form of few articles. On many of these writers there is no book length study. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the most engaging voice of her generation and has received considerable critical attention. Many essays and books have been published on her work. The anthology *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie* edited by Ernest Emenyonu describes Adichie as the universal voice who transcends the boundary of culture, race and nationality. The book also highlights the narrative styles and the themes of love, freedom, and concept of morality that Adichie deals with in her writing. Daria Tunca in the essay "Ideology in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Purple Hibiscus"* discusses the ideology of major characters with respect to freedom and religion. It examines the religious and moral hypocrisy exhibited by narrator's father and idea of independence displayed by other characters. Cynthia Wallace in her article "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and the Paradoxes of

Postcolonial Redemption" discusses how Adichie critiques the violence related to religion, colonialism and post-colonialism and patriarchy prevalent in African society. Cheryl Strobie in her essay "Dethroning the Infallible Father: Religion, Patriarchy and Politics in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*" argues how Adichie relates the family issues to the larger political conflicts and instability present in Nigeria. The article also discusses the impact of male dominance and violence on the family, Roman Catholic Church and the State.

Afghan-American writer Khalid Hosseini has emerged as one of the most widely recognized literary voices and has consequentially received considerable critical acclaim. Rebecca Stuhr in *Reading Khalid Hosseini* discusses Hosseini's works, themes, plots, contexts, and characters. The book also relates Hosseini's work to current issues and culture and raises important questions vis-à-vis Hosseini's fiction. Dr. Silima and Niloo Shokeen in the article "Bond of Love in the Novels of Khalid Hosseini" have analyzed the subtleties and complexities of human relationships as expressed in the works of Khalid Hosseini. The article also highlights the wretched condition of the people of Afghanistan in general and the plight of women in particular. Abdul Wadood Khan in his essay "Metaphors with Translingual Dimensions in the Novels of Khalid Hosseini" discusses the interplay of multiple discourses and languages in Khalid Hosseini's fiction. The article primarily focuses on Hosseini's use of metaphors to show his allegiance to multiple languages and cultures present in Afghanistan. Sohail Ghafoor and Umer Farooq in the article "Can Subaltern Be Heard: An Analysis of *The Kite Runner* and *The Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Hosseini" portray the struggles of women and other minority ethnic groups who are oppressed socially, morally and politically. The article sheds light on the modes of resistance that subaltern groups employ in their fight against the system. The subalterns are shown rising beyond the exploitation by their sacrifices and joining hands.

American author Anna Quindlen is one of the best-selling authors and is evolving in the world of literature and receiving critical attention. Most of the critical work on Anna Quindlen exists in the form of research articles. Jasmine Joy. J in the essay "Amalgamation of Pain and Passion in Anna Quindlen's *Black and Blue"* describes the struggles of women in the patriarchal society, the mental and physical violence they undergo, and their tactics of resistance and survival in the face of male dominance.

Meena Kandasamy is a contemporary Indian writer and most of the work on her writing is in the form of reviews. Dr. Tanu Kashyap in the article "Feminist Study in Meena Kandasamy's Novels *When I Hit You: Or A Portrait of the Writer as Young Wife* and *The*

Gypsy Goddess" discusses the feminist concerns of Meena Kandasamy. The article looks at Meena Kandasamy's critique of marriage as an institution which violates women in every way. The article reiterates that nothing much has changed for women. No significant work has been done on Tanya Selvaratnam's memoir *Assume Nothing: A Story of Intimate Violence.*

However, in all these works forms of domestic violence, effects of violence and the redemption of women has largely remained unexplored. This is the research gap that the current study proposes to address in the field of domestic violence, and intends to add to the critical understanding of the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Khalid Hosseini, Anna Quindlen, Meena Kandasamy and Tanya Selvaratnam in particular and gender studies in general.

Objectives:

- To critically analyze the concept of violence vis-à-vis the work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Khalid Hosseini, Anna Quindlen, Meena Kandasamy and Tanya Selvaratnam using the texts as critical tools in analyzing the subsequent violence.
- To study and critically analyze various forms of domestic violence in the select works of the Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, American author Anna Quindlen, Afghan writer Khalid Hosseini, Indian author Meena Kandasamy and Sri Lankan writer Tanya Selvaratnam.
- To examine the influence of culture, religion, and patriarchy in perpetuating domestic violence.
- To analyze and document the psychological and emotional trauma that women go through in abusive marriages.
- To examine the ideas of shame and guilt suffered by women who are victims of domestic violence.
- To examine and analyze the absence and presence of various forms of resistance that women do or do not raise against the domestic violence.
- To study the struggle of women in re-forming their identity and seeking liberation after the abuse.

Research Questions:

- How does the select work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Anna Quindlen, Khalid Hosseini, Meena Kandasamy and Tanya Selvaratnam shed light on various forms of domestic violence and the interrelation between them?

- How does domestic violence draw its justification from various cultural, religious and patriarchal concepts?
- How does the select work of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Anna Quindlen, Khalid Hosseini, Meena Kandasamy and Tanya Selvaratnam depict the psychological and emotional trauma caused by domestic violence?
- How do women resist or do not resist domestic violence and what are the conditions that constraint women to live in abusive marriages?
- How women recuperate post the trauma and re-form their identities after undergoing domestic abuse?

Research Methodology

The proposed methodology to be adopted in the research will be qualitative in nature. The primary data of this research would be the novels namely *Purple Hibiscus, Black and Blue, A Thousand Splendid Suns, When I Hit You, Or, A Portrait of the Writer as a Young Wife* and *Assume Nothing: A Story of Intimate Violence.* The primary method would be exegetical method that includes interpretation and analysis of the texts. The study will undertake a close reading of the primary texts and the secondary texts. The study will be examined within the paradigm of violence. Primarily, the proposed research will examine the concept of violence as theorized by Slavoj Zizek and Susan Brownmiller.

Tentative Chapter Plan

Introduction

(1) Conceptual Framework of Domestic Violence: An Overview

(2) Domestic Violence and the Role of Culture and Religion: A Critical Study of Select Texts

(3) Trauma and Identity Crisis as portrayed in the Select Texts

(4) Resistance to Domestic Violence in the Select Texts

Conclusion

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